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Milonga.
The "Dialogue" between Portuguese and Africans in the Congo and the Angola Wars (Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries)[1]

> Among them there are neither golden nor other metal coins as money, nor is there anything else that responds to that, but they use certain things instead, which have their fixed and regular prices, such as slaves – called *pieces* by us (*Informação acerca dos escravos de Angola*, [1576] 1989: 118).
>
> From these [slaves] the number of those captured in war is nothing in comparison with those who are bought on markets, to which the kings and the chiefs of whole Ethiopia send their slaves for sale. This trade is very old among them, and they always used to handle *pieces* instead of money for buying clothes and whatever else they needed ("História da residência" [1594] 1989: 188).
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> The money used in this city of Luanda has different qualities and values. The best is *peças de Índias*, which are slaves who are shipped to the Indies [the Americas] for the value of 22.000 *reis*; they also have *pieces* who are boys, girls, bearded blacks, and less valuable blacks, who are meant for the State of Brazil (Sousa [1624-1630] 1985: 310).
>
> And the richest mines in this Kingdom of Angola are the quantity of *pieces* which depart from this port every year, from 7 to 8000 heads of slaves each year (Cadornega [1680] 1972: 243).

The most important trade of the Portuguese and other whites with the inhabitants [of Congo] is the trade with the slaves, who are shipped to the islands of Puerto Rico, Rio Plata, Santo Domingo, Havana, Cartagena, and to the continent, especially to Brazil and other places, where they are forced to work in the sugar mills and in the mines ... And the Portuguese and Spaniards, therefore, owe almost all their wealth in the West Indies to the work of these slaves (Dapper [1688] 1964: 294-295).

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1 Slightly abridged version of chapter two of Martin Lienhard's *O Mar e o Mato: Histórias da Escravidão* (Luanda: Editorial Kilombelombe, 2005). Translation into English by Ineke Phaf-Rheinberger and the author.

1. European discourse vs. African discourses

In search of a maritime route to India, the Portuguese navigator Diogo Cão arrived at the mouth of the Zaire (or Congo) River in 1482. That same year, the Portuguese must have started, although modestly, the extraction of slaves. Two events occurred in the following two decades that completely transformed the incipient international trade of African slaves: the Spanish arrival in the Caribbean (1492), as well as on the American continent (1498), and that of the Portuguese in Brazil (1500). Based on forced labor, the development of mining in Spanish continental America and the creation of a sugar industry in the Caribbean and Brazil led to the deportation of an ever-increasing number of African slaves. For more than two centuries, Central Africa was to be desolated by the European slave trade. It has to be remembered that this would not have been possible without the collaboration of local kings, chiefs, and other agents. Assigned to satisfy the voracity of an ever-expanding slave market, Angola, at that time, entered world history as a sub-colony of Brazil (Rodrigues 1982: chapter II).

One of the consequences of the eruption of European slave-traders was the breaking out of a generalized war between the Africans and the intruders. This war also may be read as a "war of discourses" or a "dialogue" – certainly asymmetrical – between the European conquerors and their local adversaries. Which sources may we use to study this "dialogue"? Unfortunately, we are not able to retrieve authentic African "voices" from this period. No doubt contemporary Africans tried to shape, in their songs or oral narratives, the trauma caused by the eruption of European slave traders, but no written testimony of such literary productions has been preserved. The few written "African" sources are the letters in which local chiefs – called *mani* or *muene* in Congo and *soba*[2] in the Ndongo (central area of the present-

2 In this and the following linguistic footnotes, kmb. means Kimbundu, and kk. Kikongo (the two major Bantu languages in the area). Ass. refers to the Kimbundu dictionary by Assis Júnior (1947), and Sw. to the Kikongo dictionary by Swartenbroekx (1973). *Muene*. Lord, political title. "Muene puto means in the Ambunda language of Angola the Lord of Portugal. And in the maxiconga language mani means lord, and they call the king of Congo Mani Congo or Mueni congo" (Cadornega [1680] 1972: I, p. 353). Kk. *mwéné*, pl. *mamwéné*, nobleman, free man, lord (Sw.). *Soba*. Kmb. *sôba* (pl. in *ji-*). Generic name of the representatives of the local authority in a specific region (Ass.). "They are like counts or great lords" (Simões [1575] 1989).

day Republic of Angola) – used to address Portuguese authorities. Eminently diplomatic, such letters – written in Portuguese – do not reveal the real thoughts of their African authors. The remaining sources are exclusively European: chronicles, reports, and letters written by navigators, traders, political agents, governors, and priests, all of them involved in the colonial slave trade. Fortunately for us, not all of these documents represent a purely official or unilateral view of the events. Less marked by the official ideology than their Spanish colleagues involved in the conquest of America (Lienhard 2003), some of these "writers" did little to disguise the real goals of the conquerors or to keep secret the resistance of their adversaries. None of them, however, was really interested to know how the African chiefs or their subjects thought about Portuguese intrusion. For that reason, the historian trying to discover the "discourse" of Africans in documents written mostly by their European adversaries resembles someone listening to a telephone conversation between an individual close by and a distant partner. In such a situation, the indiscrete listener cannot hear the utterances of the distant interlocutor, but is able to imagine them. Thanks to Bakhtine's research on the "dialogical" nature of language, we know that any statement, as an element of a speech chain, refers to a previous utterance and anticipates, in one way or another, the following utterances (Bakhtine 1977). That means an unheard or "lost" utterance may be reconstructed from the preceding and/or the following utterances.

In the Portuguese reports mentioned before, the role of the "distant interlocutor" is performed by the "silent" Africans. We cannot hear their voices, but we can try to imagine their reactions. On this basis, we will analyze letters, chronicles, and reports written mostly between 1580 and 1680 by different actors of the military, economic, and 'spiritual' colonization of the territory the Portuguese named "Angola".[3] Two of these texts are 'classics': *Descrição histórica dos três reinos do Congo, Matamba e Angola* ("Description of the Three King-

3 *Ngôla* was the title given to the kings of Ndongo, a kingdom situated in the central part of the present-day Republic of Angola. When speaking about "Angola", the Portuguese, in the early years of their occupation, meant only this kingdom. Later on, "Angola" took approximately the shape of present-day Angola, incorporating, among many other chiefdoms, the central part of the kingdom of Congo.

doms of Congo, Matamba and Angola", [1687] 1965) by the Capuchin João António Cavazzi de Montecúccolo, and the *História geral das guerras angola nas* ("General History of the Angolan Wars", [1680] 1972) by António de Oliveira de Cadornega. Particularly rich in 'echoing' African voices, however, is the lesser-known "Extensive report" (published by Beatrix Heintze in 1985) in which Fernão de Sousa, Portuguese governor of Angola between 1624 and 1630, addressed his sons inviting them "to learn from things that happened to me; I give you a written account of them as of landmarks of government errors in order to allow you to choose" (Sousa 1985: 217). In contrast to the majority of the reports produced during the conquest of the Congo-Angola area, and without excluding the more official writings of the same author, this text manifests an uncommon lack of premeditation. It is a sort of diary in which the governor successively recorded the maneuvers of his adversaries as well as the measures he took to strengthen the Portuguese hegemony in the region. As a diary, this text is rather "spontaneous" and does not obey "political correctness". In a more official document, Fernão de Sousa certainly would have made the effort to reinterpret all the events in the light of the "political" image he wished to give of himself to his principal addressee, the Luso-Spanish Crown. In his "Extensive report", the governor also transcribes or summarizes the correspondence received from his interlocutors: Portuguese officials and African chiefs, allies or adversaries. All of these other "voices" contribute to reinforce the "dialogicity" of this report.

2. Slavery and slave trade

The famous "kingdom of Congo" – *Kóngo dia ntôtíla* ("Kongo of the King") – existed before the arrival of the Portuguese expansionists in 1482.[4] The central part of this rather vaguely defined state embraced the *Kongo* 'provinces' or chiefdoms of Sonyo, Nsundi, Mpangu, Mbamba, Mpemba, and Mbata. Its capital, Mbanza Kongo, thereafter baptized São Salvador by the Portuguese, was located in the north of the present-day republic of Angola. During the reign of Dom Afon-

4 The best introduction so far to the history and daily events in this kingdom is *La vie quotidienne au royaume du Kongo, du XVI^e^ au XVIII^e^ siècle* by Georges Balandier (1965).

so I, or Mbemba a Nzinga (1509-1540), the kingdom of Congo, as a vassal state of the Portuguese empire, was a reservoir for slave labor. In the final years of the sixteenth century, the Portuguese, because of the difficulties encountered in obtaining *pieces* in sufficient quantity (Glasgow 1982: 24), transferred their slavery headquarters south to Luanda, but they still considered the king of Congo as their vassal. When demanding his collaboration in expelling the Dutch in the 1620s, for example, the governor of Angola, Fernão de Sousa, recalls the ‘benefits’ the kingdom of Congo had received from the Portuguese, including ‘Christianity’ and military support against the *jaga* warriors in 1571 (Sousa 1985: 222).

Officially, the justification for Portuguese penetration in Central Africa was the conversion of the autochthonous kings to Christianity. As a matter of fact, the evangelization of the “savages” was part of the conditions the Pope imposed on the Iberian powers when he divided the “world” among them in the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494. However, even a superficial reading of the Portuguese reports of the conquest of the Congo-Angola area demonstrates that the actual preoccupations of the conquerors were quite different. The only goal they had in mind was obtaining the greatest possible number of *pieces* for exportation. On account of Portuguese aggression, a permanent war developed in the *matos* and savannas of Angola between the intruders and the local chiefs who tried to defend their sovereignty and, at times, their own position in the slave trade. In the last years of the sixteenth century, the Angola-based Jesuits remarked that

> as you learn by seeing the many slaves shipped to Portugal and in even greater quantity to the State of Brazil and the mines of the Spanish Indies, as well as by considering the high income earned by the economy of His Majesty thanks to the slave trade, the number of slaves obtained each year in Angola is very considerable (“História da residência” [1594] 1989: 188).

Not the conversion of the Africans, but the slave trade was, actually, the context in which the first exchanges between Africans and Europeans took place. Even for the clergy, the evangelization of the Africans was never a priority. In his “Extensive report”, Fernão de Sousa brutally stated:

> Until now, the way of baptizing the heathens has been very unsatisfactory, lacking the convenient instruction for the obtainment of Holy Bap-

> tism because the priests who came to these parts are more occupied with the buying and shipping of the negroes than with their catechization (Sousa 1985: 262).

It is worthwhile to remember that this blame comes from a governor who never opposed the slave trade. "The slave markets", he writes, are "the substance of this kingdom" (Sousa 1985: 223). By the way, no Portuguese writer of that period seems to feel horrified by the transformation of African people into *pieces*.

The moral indifference of the Lusitanians toward the enslavement of Africans is not too surprising: the use of slave labor was traditional in the Mediterranean area (Saco 1853; Capela 1978; Maestri Filho 1988a). In spite of that, as if trying to justify the trade, many Portuguese documents of that time declare that the buying and selling of slaves had been established in Africa long before the arrival of the Portuguese: "this trade is very old among them: they are accustomed to making use of *pieces* instead of money to buy clothes, and whatever else they need" ("História da residência" [1594] 1989: 188). Modern European or African historians also admit the existence of slavery in ancient Africa. But what was slavery in the African tradition? Accord-based on a conjunction of traditional rules. War prisoners, traitors, and criminals were taken as slaves, but neither noble persons nor women and children could be sold as *pieces*.[5] Moreover, the sale of slaves took place only at specific times at markets specifically designated for such commercial transactions. Sometimes, slaves also could be given as a tribute to a more powerful chief. Besides, slaves became part of the family of their master and could not be sold, usually, to anybody else.

With the intrusion of the Europeans, "traditional African slavery" was transformed into "colonial slavery" (Gorender 1985). All the consulted documents underscore a European disrespect for the traditional rules of obtaining slaves. For example, they didn't hesitate to buy slaves who "had royal blood and were outstanding dignitaries" (Pigafetta/Lopes 1951: 85). According to Fernão de Sousa (1985: 122), there were also many freed slaves found among the persons shipped to the Americas. The most noteworthy novelty of the Atlantic trade was,

5 Based on "História da residência" (1989), "Informação" (1989), Pigafetta/Lopes (1951); Sousa (1985); D. Afonso (1992).

however, the mass deportation of slaves to a distant continent. The voracity of the American markets was to increase the demand for slaves to an unprecedented degree. During the seventeenth century, Brazil alone imported no fewer than 44,000 *pieces* annually (Glasgow 1982: 51).

In the mind of the slaves, to be a slave in Africa or to be deported to the Americas was not the same. In his *Descrição histórica*, the Capuchin Cavazzi recalls the terror felt by Africans threatened with deportation to the Americas:

> There is a big difference between the slaves of the Portuguese and those of the negroes [Africans]. The first do not only obey words, but even signs. They are especially afraid of being taken to Brazil or to New Spain because they are convinced that when they arrive at those lands, they will be killed by the buyers, who, as they think, will make gunpowder of their bones and extract of their brains and flesh the oil that is sold in Ethiopia [...]. The reason they give is that they sometimes find hair in the leather bottles, which in their opinion comes from humans skinned for that purpose. Therefore, out of fear of being sent to America, they get frantic and try to run away to the forest. Others, at the moment of embarking, challenge the blows and kill themselves, jumping into the water (Cavazzi de Montecúccolo [1687] 1965: I. 160).

Aside from such individual acts of resistance, we also know about mass rebellions. In 1798, a Portuguese navigator, Joseph Antonio Pereira, tried to obtain a refund from an insurance company in Cadiz for damages to his ship in the port of Cabinda (present-day Angola) by *the rebellion of the 278 slaves he had on board* (my cursive).[6] To be shipped outside of Africa was, according to a Portuguese explorer who wrote during that same year, "the worst of all the punishments you could inflict on a *caffre*" (Almeida [1798] 1989: 113). In fact, besides threatening the "peace" of African households, the so-called 'Atlantic trade' implied radical changes for the African societies. In the words of Jan Vansina (1990: 197),

> the Atlantic trade was a spur, equivalent to the industrial revolution. Its effects must have been equally impressive. However, unlike the industrial revolution, which was home-made, the Atlantic trade was accompanied by foreign values, attitudes, and ideas. It therefore posed even more of a challenge to the old ways than the industrial revolution did in Europe.

6 Archivo Histórico Nacional (AHC), Madrid, Consejos, 20257, exp. 2, 1806, 1-5r. e 5v.

3. The *mato* as a refuge

The resistance of the local kings or chiefs against the Portuguese penetration develops mostly in the *mato* ["bush", "forest"]. The history of the resistance of "colonial" slaves begins in the African *mato as well*; it develops simultaneously in the African and the American forests. In his wide-ranging study about the rise of the first states in Central Africa, Vansina (1985) emphasizes the importance of the rain forest in the ancient history of the area. He argues that these states arose in accordance with the regional environment, characterized by the existence of a tropical forest sprinkled with savannas. In Central Africa, the rain forest played a decisive part in the war between Africans and Portuguese. Outside the forest, Africans had only few possibilities to escape Portuguese aggression. In the villages and in the open savanna, their sole options were slavery or death. However, they soon discovered the "bush" as their safest ally. By the end of the sixteenth century, the Jesuits in Angola asserted that,

> the Africans are never on the winning hand in the plain field, but when they take shelter in their strongholds, which are dense forests in times that they have leaves, they make fire without being seen, and they mostly damage our men a lot ("História de residência" [1594] 1989: 190).

Sometimes, the *mato* is a stone "forest". Queen Njinga, "Lady of Angola" (Sousa 1985: 223) and a strong enemy of the Portuguese, often fortified herself in the rocky hills of the interior. Difficult to access, the rain forest was, certainly, the strongest ally of Africans who fought – for different reasons – against the Portuguese. For these men of the Atlantic, the tropical forest was an unknown and unfriendly space or even a military and theological inferno. The *General History of The Angolan Wars* by Cadornega ([1680] 1972) reveals the obsession the forest aroused in the imaginary of the Portuguese. In virtue of the abundance of its forests, Cadornega calls Angola "a dense land" (Cadornega [1680] 1972, I: 102). In the work of this early historian, the forest becomes the quintessential expression of a hostile continent. It represents everything that hinders the advancement of Portuguese penetration. Referring to the fugitive slaves of a former Portuguese governor of Angola, Fernão de Sousa (1985: 286) assures us that they "hid themselves in the bush with the intention of defending themselves, apprehensive because of the crimes they had committed and

the eating of human flesh” (Sousa 1985: 286). What really troubles the governor is, of course, that the hidden slaves are out of his reach. Instead of recognizing the advantage the knowledge of territory offers to the Africans, he disqualifies them by accusing them of grave crimes against humanity. In his narrative, the forest – like in the famous novel by Joseph Conrad – is *the heart of darkness*, the very seat of barbarism. When the Africans discovered that the *mato* inspired such horror in the Portuguese, they made it their habitual refuge, patiently negotiating from there with the intruders. Queen Njinga, in Angola, played this game to perfection, thus provoking the increasing anger of the Portuguese. Referring to the subterfuges the Portuguese governor opposed the liberation of her sister, a prisoner in Luanda. The queen wrote on 13 December 1655: “For these and other betrayals I took shelter in the *matos*, far from my territories” (Cadornega 1972, II: 501). By withdrawing to the forest, the queen was not only obeying a military imperative, but also putting pressure on the Portuguese. If they wanted her to get out of the forest, they had to fulfill a series of conditions. Meanwhile, she would resist: that was, in her political language, the sense of her withdrawal to the *matos*.

Besides its strategic function in the military and political struggle between the Africans and the Portuguese, the forest constituted, in the eyes of the autochthonous, a ‘sacred’ space. In the *História* of Cadornega, as was mentioned before, allusions to the “dense forests” of Angola are abundant. By repeating observations made by Jesuits almost a century before, the Portuguese historian hints to the religious dimension the bush or the forest had for Africans: “seeing that they could not triumph over us in the open lands, they gathered unwillingly in the sanctuary: their vast and dense *matos*” (Cadornega [1680] 1972, I: 81). By 1586, Father Diogo da Costa (1989: 163) had affirmed that the natives “worship wood and stones”. In the same period, Duarte Lopes alluded to the “symbiosis” that existed, in Congo, among humans and the elements of nature: “men and women do not have proper, convenient, and rational names, but are called after plants, stones, birds and animals” (Pigafetta/Lopes 1951: 65). By giving themselves names of plants, stones, or animals, the natives manifested the intensity of their relation with the natural cosmos. The *mato*, concretely, becomes a sacred space in which men receive the protection and the power of their traditional “deities”. It is true that in the texts

written by functionaries of the Portuguese empire, the quality of the relationship the Africans maintained with the *mato* or the forest as a sacred space is not described precisely. Something that may allow us, at least to a certain point, to imagine the content of this relationship, are certain songs – *mambos*[7] – of the present-day Cuban "Congos". A creation of Cuban slaves, these songs are not strictly "African": it would be naïve, therefore, to consider them a "source" for the reconstruction of an African *(Kongo)* cosmovision. It is probable, however, that their "core" still draws upon the *kongo* cosmovision. In the *mambos* I had the opportunity to hear in Havana (1993), an ever-present word is *(n)finda*[8]. In present-day Kikongo, *mfînda* is "bush" or "forest". *(N)finda* is invoked by the *palo monte* communities as the residence of the spirits of the dead and the spirits of nature. It is the space of origin and tradition. Therefore, we can suppose that by hiding themselves in the *matos*, the Central African populations not only tried to escape the persecution of the slavers, but also renewed contact with their ancestors, their traditions, and their "powers". The *mfînda* allowed them to recover the energies they needed to keep struggling against the *mindèlé* ('whites').

For the Africans, the war was never a purely military matter. On the contrary, they dedicated themselves to it with the whole stock of their traditional beliefs. Many Portuguese texts suggest that, for the Africans, all circumstances involving military activity bore religious meanings: "When some poor soldier in the camp happens, in his dream, to cry *itá, itá*, which means war, war, the others take that as a bad omen and cut his head off" ("História da residência" [1594] 1989: 190). Before going into action, the Africans consulted their "deities". A nobleman "consulted his fetishes before crossing a river. He was told that crossing the river, he would be killed" (Afonso [1581] 1989: 138). The invoked fetishes were right, but the nobleman was not given time to take advantage of their advice: "By seeing that he did not cross, our troops attacked him and took forty women, the most distin-

7 *Mambo*. Ritual song in *palo monte* communities. Kk. *màmbù* (pl. of *diàmbù*), trade, word, process, story, ritualized conversation (Sw.).

8 *(n)finda*. Also *finda*. "Those dense wood that these people call enfindas" (Cadornega [1680] 1972: II, 56). "The land of the dead is often called *mfinda*" (Bentley 1887: 347). Kk. *mfînda* (class i-zi), forest, wood (Sw.).

guished of his house, and killed some of his men" (Afonso [1581] 1989: 138).

Europeans also invoked their "deities": Saint Anthony, the Mother of God, and Santiago, the Iberian holy warrior. A battle that broke out in December 1622 between the Portuguese and the army of Manibumbe, a vassal of the king of Congo, was transformed into a battle among rival deities:

> Our Portuguese, in the heat of the battle, called Santiago, and the Muxicongos[9] did the same. When they realized it, they said 'you have a white Santiago, while ours is black'. But our white one showed to be more powerful (Afonso [1581] 1989, I: 105).

4. Languages of violence

The fundamental context for the start of the Luso-African "dialogue" in the Congo-Angola region was, as we already know, the development of the Atlantic trade. To make contact with African chiefs, the Portuguese would "propose" an agreement of vassalage through which they committed themselves to providing them military help; the local chiefs would have to pay tributes and allow them full commercial freedom. The Africans were not always eager to accept those conditions. If they rejected the proposed alliance, the Portuguese, according to "juridical" rules established by themselves, declared war. Any war, whether they were victorious or not, was always an opportunity for the Portuguese to obtain large quantities of slaves. Explicit in this sense is a commentary of Father Baltasar Afonso ([1583] 1989: 142): "There is no war in which our troops do not get rich because they take many *pieces* [slaves] oxen, sheep, salt, oil, pigs, mats."

Besides its military and economic aspects, war was also a means of communication, a "language" based on more or less institutionalized codes. Through their specific way of making war, the Portuguese sought to demonstrate their superiority and their ambition of total control over the territories. The "signifier" used to transmit this message was indiscriminate violence:

> It happened here that a father fled with his child from our troops, and seeing that he could not save his son he turned to us and shot all his ar-

9 *muxicongo*. Inhabitant of the Kongo kingdom. Kk. *músí* (pl. *bísí*), inhabitant, and *kóngo*, population of the Congo basin (Sw.).

> rows until they killed him; he never abandoned his place so that his son could hide, and the father died and went to hell. Another man was in a house with two women and defended himself without any intention to surrender, so strongly that they put fire to the house, and burnt all three of them. This caused such a terror amongst our enemies that the whole of Angola was afraid of us (Afonso [1581] 1989: 135).

This story of an Angolan father's heroism provides evidence of the symbolic aspects of Portuguese violence. By acting with utter cruelty, the conquerors continuously "signified" the futility of any resistance. Another frequent practice of the Portuguese, mass decapitation, was the signifier of a similar message. Around 1620, "conforming to the customs of these kingdoms", the lieutenant-general of the Portuguese in Angola, João Mendes de Vasconcellos, convoked the *sobas* vassals of the Crown for a *maca*[10] – a sort of public trial based on the intervention of witnesses. Officially, the concern was to judge the "betrayal" of these chiefs, allies of Queen Njinga. According to Cadornega, the real goal of this encounter was to stage

> [...] a mass decapitation of black people (not inferior to that which King Xico inflicted on the Abencerrajes in the City of Granada, or to that of the famous duke of Alba in Flanders), who all had to pay with their heads for the betrayal, an event which would remain immemorial for the future of all the heathens of these astonished and fearful kingdoms: only with rigor and terror, we are able to maintain our domination over these indomitable pagans (Cadornega [1680] 1972, I: 92).

To further enhance the impact of such messages, the Portuguese did not hesitate to violate the bodies of their dead enemies: "From another war, [the Portuguese] brought 619 noses of decapitated men, and in another there were so many dead that they said they couldn't avoid walking on them" (Afonso [1583] 1989: 142).

The Africans fully understood the meaning of such messages. According to the stories of their adversaries, they used to respond with verbal violence. In the course of a battle on the Kwanza River, for example, the Africans, "loudly screaming, said they would eat all of us the next day" (Afonso [1583] 1989: 137). It has to be remembered that in European reports of that period, we frequently find allusions to

10 *mac*a. "Maca is a meeting in a public place where people can expose their arguments" (Cadornega [1680] 1972, I: 91). Kmb. *máka* (pl.), conversations, questions, disputes (Ass.).

African ‘cannibalism’. Jerónimo Castaño, a Spanish missionary in Angola, comments in 1599:

> This is the fourth time [the king of Angola asks for peace]. The last time, when Governor Paulo Dias sent presents to him with some Portuguese and [the king] agreed with the peace terms, when they arrived, he ate all of them (Gomes 1951: 60).

Did he actually eat them? In European colonial sources, allusion to cannibalism is always suspect because it is used to justify the so-called “rightful war” against populations who reject colonialism. In fact, far from being based on actual observation, allusions to African cannibalism mostly derive from an inaccurate interpretation of certain African speech patterns. As we heard before, Africans threatened the Portuguese by boasting that they would eat all of them. By saying this, they are not really uttering the intention to eat the Portuguese. By using a speech pattern I call *boasting speech*, they only intend to scare their enemies. Verbal violence against real and unlimited violence: the asymmetry of the “dialogue” between Europeans and Africans is evident.

5. Diplomatic languages

In Angola, during the first half of the seventeenth century, the exchange of diplomatic letters was the most prestigious “channel” for the “dialogue” between the Portuguese governor and his African interlocutors, allies or adversaries. It is important to understand that the correspondence between the representatives of the Portuguese crown and their African “vassals” was only an annex to a circuit of communication whose center was located in Europe. The messages exchanged through this channel always bore the mark of the European written tradition and the feudal language used in the Spanish-Portuguese empire. Of course, epistolary communication was radically alien to the local oral tradition. No expression of autonomous African thought would fit in a letter, which respected the rules of feudal correspondence. By writing or dictating a letter, African kings or chiefs implicitly recognized their submission to the Iberian crown. When a Portuguese governor, in a diplomatic letter, offered the status of a “vassal” to some of the local chiefs, the latter, if responding via the same channel, could only declare his acceptance. That means that the

channel or medium – diplomatic correspondence, in this case – decisively shaped the content of the message. The famous theory of McLuhan (1967) – "the medium is the message" – receives here an evident confirmation. Of course, African chiefs did not always agree with the Portuguese hegemony. If they wanted to speak out their refusal, they would lay hand on other means like orality, body language, and, last but not least, war.

A letter of Angola Aire, puppet king of the Portuguese "Angola", who had been elected under pressure and in the presence of the Portuguese by a council of autochthonous "electors", in October 1626 offers a good example of what an African lord was allowed to say in a diplomatic letter addressed to a Portuguese authority. In the words of Fernão de Sousa, its author, the "king"

> [...] thanked me for having made him a king, and excused himself for not having sent me what he owed to me for this reason; he [said] he would do it at a given time because in this very moment, he didn't have any properties. He begged me to catch the free maroon negros in order to people with them his kingdom. He explained he could not open the [slave] market for not being ready yet. Arguing that people said that the *jaga* Caza and [the queen] Ginga Ambande were between Zungui Amoque and Andalla Quesua causing great damage and threatening war, he begged for protection and security of life. He asked me for an umbrella and a hat for himself, similar to that worn by the king of Congo, some tambourines and some bells, a carpet and a silk blanket and paper, and he sent me a black woman with hanging breasts, a bearded negro, and four negroes (Sousa 1985: 260).

In this piece of writing, Angola Aire, the new and so grateful "king", is speaking as a "good vassal". A thorough reading of his letter, however, shows that he does not offer anything concrete to the Portuguese. Pointing to the difficult situation of his kingdom, Angola Aire refuses, without saying so explicitly, to create the slave markets and to pay the tributes the Portuguese expect from him. His letter is a refined diplomatic exercise: by simulating his submission, the "vassal" hopes to avoid its consequences. As can be learned from the governor's summary, the puppet king accompanied his epistle with another kind of message. The gift of a "black women with hanging breasts, a bearded negro, and four [other] negroes" does not meet, of course, the expectations of the governor. Without breaking the rules of official communication, the mediocrity of Aire's gift symbolically indicates the limits

of his good will. As we will see later on, the puppet king would finally get tired of this role.

In his report, governor Fernão de Sousa transcribes a letter that queen Njinga sent on 3 March 1625 to the *capitão-mor* ("field-marshall") of Angola, Bento Banha Cardoso. Notwithstanding the hate she always seems to have felt for the Portuguese (Sousa 1985: 227), she knew perfectly the rules of diplomatic correspondence:

> With all my heart I appreciate that Your Honour will come to this fort of Embaca, allowing me to give to you, as to a father, an account of how, when I sent some *pieces* to the market of Bumba Aquiçanzo, Aire launched an attack and stole some thirty *pieces* from me. When I gave orders to demand satisfaction from him as my vassal, my warriors found themselves face to face with nine men who were with Tigre [Estêvão de Seixas Tigre] in my territory, and when he pushed these nine men against my troops outside the Pedra [de Pungo Andongo], they were, God willing, defeated by my warriors. The surviving six of them were delivered to me. It made me sad to learn that in Aire's rocks there are Portuguese soldiers supporting Aire. I received them warmly because they are vassals of the king of Spain, to whom I owe obedience as the Christian I am (Sousa 1985: 244-245).

This letter is one of the best examples the report of Fernão de Sousa provides to anybody willing to see to what extent the means (or the "channel") determine the form as well as the content of a message. Through her attack on the Portuguese, the queen, in the transparent language of war, "declared" that she would not tolerate the penetration of the Europeans into her kingdom, and that she did not lack military means to defend her territory. However, as an author of a diplomatic letter addressed to the chief of her enemies, "Dona Ana de Sousa" exposes the same circumstances according to the norms of epistolary communication with a superior. If we read what she actually wrote, it seems that she never attacked the Portuguese: she only sent an expedition to punish one of her vassals, the puppet king, for the hold up he had launched against her slaves. By pretending to ignore the privileged relations that existed between Aire (Aquiloange)[11] and the Por-

11 (Aquiloange) Aire should not be confounded with (Angola) Aire. After the death of the father of the future queen Njinga, the Portuguese needed to find a new king for Ndongo or 'Angola'. By maintaining a hostile attitude towards the intruders, Njinga could not be their candidate. Therefore, they chose (Aquiloange) Aire, "the closest family member of the king of Angola" according to Fernão de Sousa

tuguese, she argues that the encounter of her warriors with the troops of the governor was purely accidental. As for the victory of her warriors against the Portuguese, it was, simply, "God's will".

Although the queen's argumentation is absolutely sarcastic, she formally confirms her submission and loyalty to the Spanish-Lusitanian Crown. Throughout her long struggle with the Portuguese, the queen, without abdicating her principles, always showed a great ability in the choice of the "channel": diplomacy or war.

In Angola, diplomatic correspondence was usually conveyed by *macunzes*[12], "ambassadors" of the local chiefs – or of the Portuguese. These messengers were responsible for transmitting oral messages. In the court of the Portuguese governor, the oral messages, recited by the "ambassadors" in some African language (probably Kikongo and Kimbundu), required the help of an interpreter. To what extent could African chiefs choose between oral and written communication? For the *sobas*, written communication was certainly out of reach. Only the kings seem to have had interpreters and scribes at their service. The king of Congo as well as Angola Aire, the puppet king of Ndongo, apparently preferred writing as a way of demonstrating their real or feigned loyalty to the Portuguese. As for the queen Njinga, she systematically alternated letters with oral messages.

On 17 December 1627, Alvaro Roiz de Sousa, captain of the fort of Embaca, informs Fernão de Sousa about the arrival of two *macunzes* of queen Njinga conveying an oral message. In the previous month, the governor had declared an all-out war on the queen (Sousa 1985: 294). In the governor's words

> [...] the [queen's] message contained instructions proposing to submit [the *macunzes*], in her name, to an ordeal they call *quelumbo*[13], in order to prove that the incident which occurred in the Quezos: the death and

(Heintze 1985, I: 202). As Aquiloange Aire died of pox in the Portuguese camp, they finally "supported" his half-brother Angola Aire.

12 *Macunze*. "Mukunzes are envoys or ambassadors in the Ambunda language" (Cadornega [1680] 1972, I: 349). Kmb. *múkunji* (class *mu-a*), envoy, prophet, missionary (Ass.). Kk. *nkùnzi* (class *mu-ba*), bearer, ambassador, envoy (Sw.).

13 Kmb. *kilúmbu* (class ki-i), ordeal. Test which serves to assert the truth of the affirmations of the individual. Testers apply white-hot metal to the body of persons suspected or oblige them to absorb some poison.

> the imprisonment of several *pombeiros*[14] [catchers of slaves], the robbery of *pieces* and fabrics, had not been ordered by her, and if the said two negroes died because of the ordeal, she would be glad to have her head cut off, but if they did not die with the ordeal, it would be clear that she did not have any responsibility in this incident because she did not join with the Quezos, nor did the *sobas* of Lucala join with her, and she was not at war with any of them. The only wish she had was to be a *piece* and a daughter of mine, and to obtain permission to *tungar*[15] [settle] on the island of the *imbillas*[16] [graveyards] where her brother died, and that for God's sake Angola Aire should be the king, because she wanted to retire for being tired of living in the *matos* (Sousa 1985: 296-297).

According to this summary by the governor, Njinga, by choosing the oral "channel", seems to pursue the same goals as when, in the former example, she addresses the governor by means of diplomatic correspondence. The way she justifies herself and denies any responsibility for the 'crimes' attributed to her by the Portuguese resembles perfectly the way she used in her letters. There are, however, several allusions to another kind of argumentation. One of them is the wish to *tungar* ("settle") on the island that hosts the grave of her brother. If we remember the importance of the ancestor's cult amongst Bantu populations, we understand immediately that the "Christian" queen intends to honor, in that place, the memory of her dead brother. A Congo king quoted by Wing (1921: 285) in the early twentieth century seems to justify the queen's wish: *Ga k'akala nkulu aku ko, k'ulendi tunga ko* ("Don't settle in a place where there are none of your ancestors"). Everybody knew that Queen Njinga never detached herself from a receptacle called *mosete*[17] in which she "enclosed the bones of her forefathers" (Cadornega [1680] 1972, II: 167). In a diplomatic letter, the expression of her wish to continue honoring – in an African way – the memory of her brother certainly would have been perceived as proof of her persistent resistance against Christianity and European

14 *pombeiros*. African slave traders in the service of the Portuguese (area Congo-Angola). *Pumbo* or *pombo* "are places and villages in which the slave markets are organized and where they sell our products in exchange of clothes and *pieces* of slaves" (Sousa 1985: 324).

15 *tungar*. "Tungar means to make quarter and houses" (Cadornega [1680] 1972, I: 345). Kmb. and kk. *-tung*a, to build, to construct, to settle.

16 *imbilla*. Name of an island in the Kwanza River (Angola). "They call their graves *imbilla*" (Cadornega [1680] 1972, III: 263). Kmb. *mbila* (plural in *ji-*), tomb, grave (Ass.).

17 Kmb. *músete* (class mu-mi), shrine, bag (Ass.).

values.[18] In an oral message in an African tongue, however, the same expression does not seem to have scandalized the Portuguese governor.

Perhaps the *script* proposed by Njinga for the reception of her oral message – an ordeal – is clearer evidence of her "African way of thinking". Used as a means of diplomatic exchange, the written word is a "weapon", but certainly not the expression of truth. On the contrary, in the African – oral – system of communication, an "ethic code" guarantees, in principle, the sincerity of the speaker as well as the veracity of the transmitted message. This veracity, as we see in Njinga's message, may be controlled through a ritual proof: to certify her sincerity to the governor, she proposes indeed the application of the *quelumbo*, an ordeal, to her *macunzes*. If they died, she explains, "she would be glad to have her head cut off". Based on a non-Christian theology, the proof proposed by Njinga to assert the veracity of her message demonstrates that the Christian faith she professed in her diplomatic letters was merely "diplomatic". Of course, the "authentic" Christian faith of the Portuguese did not allow them to accept the "diabolic" proof proposed by their enemy. As "Christians", the technique they chose to know the "truth" was "Christian". More concretely, it had developed in the jails of the Inquisition. Like the defendants in the trials organized by the Holy Office, Njinga's *macunzes* were considered guilty before they had the opportunity to "confess". In a secret session, the Portuguese decided that "if they were not willing to confess, they would oblige them by torture to declare where [the queen] was, and that this – to prevent negroes from speaking about it – had to be done by Portuguese" (Sousa 1985: 296). The first to pay for his "crime" was the queen's *mani lumbo*[19], who accompanied the two *macunzes*. In a desperate effort to escape death, he offered an apparently full "confession". In spite of that, the Lusitans, declaring him guilty of espionage, condemned him to death. Thus, the

18 As it becomes clear from Cavazzi's *Descrição histórica*, the worship Njinga dedicated to the memory of Ngola Mbande, her deceased brother, continued thirty years after her negotiations with Fernão de Sousa, creating a serious strain on the relationship between the queen, officially Christian, and the Europeans – especially the catholic priests – present on her territory (Lienhard 1999).

19 *mani lumbo*. Also *muene lumbo*. "Muene lumbo is the one who has contact with the Royal House and supervises the most valuable things of that house" (Cadornega [1680] 1972, I: 353).

Portuguese, like the Africans, had at their disposal a *quilumbo* of their own: an arbitrary means to test the sincerity of their adversaries. The main difference between the African and the European ordeal is a contrasting attitude toward orality. The African attitude is positive – sacred, the spoken word is considered to be 'true'. Nobody, therefore, minds submitting to a *quilumbo*. For the Portuguese, the spoken word, on the contrary, is essentially deceptive – only violence allows the "truth" to emerge.

6. African rhetoric: *nongonongo*

If we stick to Fernão de Sousa's transcriptions of the oral messages he received from his African interlocutors, it seems that they were free of any rhetorical or poetical artifice. To what degree, however, are these transcriptions reliable? The *makunzes*, without any doubt, recited their messages in one of the local Bantu languages. The governor did not speak any of them; moreover, he does not show any particular interest in understanding the surrounding linguistic culture. The veil that covers the rhetoric of his African adversaries is partially lifted only in a few fragments of his report. As we already know from the letter queen Njinga sent to the governor on 3 March 1625, she had – thanks to God – captured six Portuguese. In a message transmitted by her *mani lumbo* to Sebastião Dias, the captain of the fort of Embaca, the queen made their delivery conditional on several requirements, especially the suppression of the military support given by the Portuguese to Aquiloange Aire, the puppet king she considered her vassal. As the captain did not accept her conditions, the queen sent her *moenho*[20] – private ambassador – to repeat her demands. The dialogue between the queen's emissary and the Portuguese captain developed, in the words of the governor, as follows

> [...] in the message he transmitted from Ginga, the *moenho* said the same by way of the following comparison: "There has been a heavy rain, which has reached some hen and plucked them; they have retired to a house, where they wait now to recover their feathers". Sebastião Dias answered that if she did not want to bring those Portuguese, she had better send them and not retain them as hostages [to be exchanged] for Diungo Amoiza and Aire Quiloange because there might be a thunderstorm and a

20 *Moenho.* "This is life" (Cadornega [1680] 1972, III: 265). Kmb. *muénhu* (class *mu-mi*), soul, existence, spiritual force (Ass.).

> flash might fall on the house where the hen were recovering their feathers, and burn it down (Sousa 1985: 243).

A missive sent by the six Portuguese to the captain helps to understand the issue of this rather enigmatic dialogue. They wrote that their liberty "would not cost more than to hand over Dungo Amoíza and to ship Aire" (Sousa 1985: 243). The queen pretended, as a matter of fact, to exchange her prisoners for a befriended *soba* prisoner of the Portuguese and to obtain, at the same time, the withdrawal of the puppet king Aire Aquiloange. Through his ironical "comparison", the *moenho* stressed that the queen was prepared to wait until the Portuguese accepted her conditions. His interlocutor, Sebastião Dias, a Portuguese soldier familiarized with this type of verbal exchange, responded in the same way, evoking, with evident sarcasm, the risks the queen would run should she not cede to the pressures of the Portuguese. This apparently strange dialogue may be situated easily within the Bantu tradition of "enigmatic dialogue". Referring to this tradition, our always well-informed Cadornega wrote in 1680:

> These heathens from the province of Quissama [south of Luanda] speak in an enigmatic way, using nicknames and metaphors. He who knows their fashion and their tongue speaks to them and answers in the same style. Thus, he who understands their inventions and their tricks, manages to pay them back in the same coin (Cadornega [1680] 1972, II: 344).

The "metaphorical" rhetoric Cadornega ascribes to the "pagans of Quissama" is, in fact, common in the Bantu area. Among proverbs, riddles, apologues and jokes, it nurtures a gamut of minor literary genders. According to Chatelain, one of the names assigned to the riddle in Kimbundu (the language probably used by the emissary of the queen and the Portuguese captain in their venomous dialogue) is *nongonongo* (Chatelain 1888-1889: 143). In Kikongo, *nóngo*[21] is used for a "pungent saying", for a way to mock the interlocutor through a fable or an apologue. In the following Kimbundu "proverb", recollected by Chatelain (1888-1889: 140), the sarcasm often accompanying the enigmatic rhetoric is evident: *Uanienga xitu, nguma ia jimbua* ("Who carries flesh, is an enemy to dogs"). It is used to criticize a person whose arrogant behavior provokes social reproval. When ut-

21 Class *i-zi*.

tered after a person has already suffered "the dog's bite", i.e. the negative consequences of his arrogant behavior, it takes on a clearly sarcastic meaning.

In the seventeenth-century reports of the Portuguese, allusions to the rhetoric used by the Africans in their verbal exchanges with the Europeans are rare. Typically, their authors reduce African speech to its purely denotative aspects. Therefore, the brief dialogue between queen Njinga's *moenho* and the Portuguese captain is one of the rare opportunities we have to imagine the "tone" of the verbal exchanges between conquerors and conquered. Irony similar to that used by Njinga's ambassador in his *nongonongo* can be discovered, retrospectively, in several of the queen's written messages we find in his "diary". If we go back to the letter in which Njinga declares her "compassion" for the six unfortunate Portuguese who fell into the trap laid by her troops (3 March 1625), we now "hear", notwithstanding her perfectly diplomatic language, the verbal perfidy it hides. In fact, the affirmation of her "regrets" for the "divine" punishment suffered by the Portuguese, those "plucked hens", in the oral message of the *moenho*, scarcely cover the expression of the most profound sarcasm.

7. African rhetorics: *milonga*

The "journal" kept by Fernão de Sousa contains numerous allusions to another African speech pattern: *milonga*. In Kimbundu, *milónga* (plural of *mulónga*) refers not only to "words", but also to more specific uses of speech: "affirmations", "reasons", "trial", "calumny", "offense". In the text of the governor, *milonga* seems to point to a rather specific speech pattern. According to Fernão de Sousa, Njinga's *milongas* have the power to persuade whole villages to flee to the lands under her control:

> [Njinga] kept temporizing with messages she sent me, and her *macunzes*, on their way back, in this city as well as in [the lands of] the *sobas* along where they passed, persuaded our slaves and our black soldiers, whom they call *quimbares*[22], that they should go to her, and that she would give them land to work and live on because it was better for them to be native lords than to be our slaves; and with such messages, which they call

22 Kmb. *kimbari* (class *ki-i*), tenant.

> *milongas*, she has such an influence over them that that complete *senzalas*[23] [villages] run over to her (Sousa 1985: 227).

In Fernão de Sousa's report, *milonga* seems to hint at a speech of persuasion based on promises or threats. From the viewpoint of the governor, this sort of speech is essentially treacherous. Africans were not the only ones who knew how to use it. The governor shows that Portuguese also were capable to practice it successfully:

> "To dress" is a fashion that was introduced to ask the *sobas* for *pieces* [slaves] in the following manner: the governors sent a *macunze*, who is an ambassador, with a quantity of silk clothes, *empondas* [clothes] and *farregoulo*s, which is the clothing of the negroes, and this *macunze* told each *soba* that he was the *macunze* of the governor and that he came looking for *loanda* [tribute], and as the *macunzes* were always persons well trained for this business, they stripped the best they could from each *soba*, obliging them with practices they call *milonga*s to give to the governor, the *macunze*, the interpreter and their companions, the [number of] slaves they could not [really afford to] give (Sousa 1985: 279).

In this case, *milonga* seems to be a speech used to persuade his interlocutor to do or to give something he is not really prepared or willing to do or to give. In the journal of Fernão de Sousa, we can see that the practice of *milonga* often implies using body language, mime and other theatrical means. The Africans as well as the Portuguese seem to know how to use such means for their purposes of persuasion.

8. Body language

Body language seems to play a capital role in the Luso-African "dialogue". One day, in order to convince the puppet king, Angola Aire, to support the war against queen Njinga, the Portuguese field marshal reminds him of the duties he has as a vassal of the Portuguese king (Sousa 1985: 328). Conscious that "the kingdom did not belong him", Aire refuses to continue the masquerade. Replying to the field marshal, he stages a curious mime sequence:

> [...] he answered that he and Ginga were children of the field marshal, that he did not mind if [the Portuguese] wanted to crown her queen, that he would go to Pedras or to Lembo and stay there, and that they could cut his head off. Then he sat on the ground, stood up, took a straw in his hand and handed it over to the interpreter, so giving to understand that he surrendered the kingdom, and, by turning his back very impolitely,

23 Kmb. *sanzala* (plural *ji*-), village, settlement outside the residence of the *soba*.

> he left without giving anything to the porters who had asked him for provisions for the war that was being made in his favor and that he had requested, even if he said he did not (Sousa 1985: 328).

What is interesting about this scene is that Aire, at the exact moment he gives up his role as puppet king in the service of the Portuguese, stops talking and adopts non-verbal means of communication, undoubtedly inspired by the "autochthonous" tradition. This way, he shows that he has resolved to leave definitely the world of the Portuguese. These were quick enough to understand the meaning of this body language message. The governor had already chosen the person who, in his opinion, had the capacity to play the role of king or queen of "Angola": Dona Maria Cambo, sister of Njinga and of Ngola Mbandi, the former king of Ndongo.[24]

As for the Portuguese, they learned to use mime or body language to their own advantage. Sousa offers a vivid description of the methods used by Portuguese officials and traders :

> At other times, certain persons offered to realize such missions by contract for a certain amount of *pieces* [slaves], and some were so devoted that they offered to do that on their own cost. When they made the journey in such a way they provided themselves with silk and other things, went to the provinces, and every time they arrived to [the residence of] a *soba*, they sat down on an armchair and performed the role of the governor, and by intimidating the *soba*, they obliged him, when he was powerful, to give them at least ten slaves, and when he was less powerful, only five, not counting the other ones he had to give them for their needs of company, alimentation and lodging, among them sometimes women and children of the *sobas*, with a great disrespect they felt deeply. The captains of the forts did and continue doing the same by sending *macunzes* to the *soba*s in imitation of the governors (Sousa 1985: 279-280).

In these and other similar cases, the use of mimic codes by Portuguese adventurers creates the fraudulent illusion of the governor's presence. Fernão de Sousa obviously denounces such simulacra. That notwithstanding, certain stagings realized by the governor were hardly less spectacular than those of his subalterns. As a great "communicator", Fernão de Sousa skillfully combined diplomatic writing, body language, and the language of violence. In his answer to a letter the field marshal sent him on 16 February 1629, Fernão de Sousa (1985: 327) wrote:

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24 See Sousa's letter of 25 August 1629 (Heintze 1985, II: 230-231).

> If the imprisoned *sobas* do not submit as vassals, you shall give orders to apply to their chests two stamps of mine, and let them go; on account of their little value and things that may happen in the future, it is more important that they remain marked as my slaves.

This way, the "presence" of Fernão de Sousa would remain "staged" forever on the bodies of the humiliated *sobas*, compelled from now on to act as involuntary propagandists of his politics. By marking the bodies of his adversaries with his stamp, the governor repeats a particularly perverse use of writing, which we know also from other areas colonized by the Europeans. A missionary-chronicler of the colonization of Mexico wrote, around 1541, that the Spaniards "applied on the faces [of the Indians] so many inscriptions besides the principal stamp of the king that they had the whole face written because they had inscriptions of all who had bought and sold them" (Motolínia 1985: paragraph 50). Imitating cattle branding, this practice expresses, better than any words, the mentality of the European slavers in Africa and America.

9. Rumors

In Angola, the communication between Africans and Portuguese was not always carried out within the "official" circuit discussed above. Fernão de Sousa's report presents many cases of indirect or "oblique" communication. I am referring here especially to messages received by the Portuguese through their prisoners and to the rumors constantly buzzing around their ears. Some of these indirect messages contain details about life in African military camps that never figure in the official messages of the *sobas* nor of the queen herself. How does "indirect" or "involuntary" communication work? Who, if anybody, wants to communicate with whom and with what intention? Fernão de Sousa's journal does not provide explicit answers to such questions. Who, for example, are the real interlocutors in the following story?

> [...] and the negro [slave of Pedro de Sousa Sotomayor] said that she [the queen] did not have many soldiers, and that she retired to a house, very sad and angry about what happened, and did not talk to anybody, and for that reason sent the *macunzes* to take the *quelumbo*, which is a local ordeal, to prove that she had nothing to do with nor ordered what happened (Sousa 1985: 299).

The governor summarizes here the apparently “spontaneous” testimony of an anonymous African captured by the Portuguese. Rather curiously, the testimony of the “negro” recalls the arguments Njinga had used to prove her sincerity to the Portuguese. Are we faced, then, with a false testimony, directly “inspired” by the instructions of the queen? The governor’s “Extensive report” suggests continuously the charisma and the influence Njinga exercised not only over her own subordinates, but also over broad groups of the African population theoretically controlled by the Portuguese. It must not have been difficult for her to organize and control the circulation of certain ‘rumors’. Thus, the “testimony” of the anonymous slave may have been a rumor deliberately spread by the queen to strengthen her credibility among the Portuguese. The following passage of the governor’s diary evokes another history of rumors:

> Ginga, knowing that Aire [Aquiloange] had gone to the fort, revealed her mood and convoked all the *sobas* of Coanza to declare war on him. She pretended that the *sobas* had told her that he [Aire] had gone to the fort and, by the same occasion, taken the title of “king”, and that, therefore, they wanted to declare war and not obey him, and [that] they had asked her to approve them and to give them a chief capable to lead them to war. She, Ginga, had answered that she did not order the war, but, as they wanted to launch it, she would give them a chief – it was a *macota* [“elder”] of hers (Sousa 1985: 240).

It is clear that in the eyes of the governor, the debate between Njinga and the *sobas* about the opportunity of a war against Aquiloange Aire is pure “fiction”, a story invented by the queen in order to delude him into thinking that only under pressure of the *sobas* had she undertaken the war. But how was this “fiction” transmitted to the governor or to his representative in the war zone, the field marshal Bento Banha Cardoso? The most likely answer is that the queen herself spread the rumor of her lack of responsibility in the launching of the war, a rumor that may not have been a complete “fiction” because the attitude Njinga imputes to the *sobas* does not seem to be a mere product of her fantasy. In fact, the governor himself presents many formal testimonies confirming the anti-Portuguese attitude of several African chiefs. In June 1629, for instance, he notes that the *soba* Andala Quionza of the *sobado* of Andala Queçuba refused to receive the “ambassadors” of the Portuguese field marshal. Back from their mission, the *macunzes* declared in the presence of several witnesses that

> [...] traveling to the lands of the said Andala Queçuba, they arrived at the *libata* (that is a residence) of a *macota* (that is an adviser) who lives on the border of the lands. [This *macota*] did not let them pass to transmit the *milonga* they brought for his *soba* Andala Queçuba, but he told them to deliver the message they brought from [Aire] Angola, because they did not know the captain [field marshal] neither wanted to have anything to do with him (Sousa 1985: 337).

The unfriendly attitude of this *makota* shows that the traditional chiefs were not necessarily willing to collaborate with the Portuguese. At the same time, they did not always feel strong enough to undertake war against them. The best option was, in that case, "passive resistance". Fernão de Sousa's report is full of stories showing attitudes of this type, but it also offers examples of more radical attitudes of resistance. Particularly hostile was the attitude of *soba* Bujlla or (A)mbuyla. The Portuguese, considering his territory part of the "kingdom of Angola", demanded his submission. Mbuyla, however, always proclaimed to be a vassal of the king of Congo (Sousa 1985: 258-259, 269). The differences between Mbuyla and the Portuguese threatened to develop into an "international" conflict because the king of Congo, who supported the *soba*, was at that time an ally of the Dutch, competitors of the Portuguese in Africa as well as in Brazil. Considering the gravity of the situation, Fernão de Sousa did not hesitate to threaten the king of Congo, reminding him, in good Africanized Portuguese that "*mocanos*[25] ["problems"] among kings had to be decided by arms" (Sousa 1985: 259). His transcription of Mbuyla's speech deserves our attention:

> Bujllas became even more arrogant and said that Bento Banha [the Portuguese field marshal] had to be his *macota* ["elder"] and that he [Mbuyla] had to be appointed governor in Loanda, and he started to upset the *sobas* vassals persuading them that they should revolt, [saying] that he was *mani Puto* ["lord of Portugal"] and his wife *mani Congo* ["queen of Congo"] (Sousa 1985: 340-341).

Where did the governor hear the inflammatory speech he imputes to Mbuyla? As he does not reveal his sources, we must assume that he is drawing upon rumors spread by the *soba* to create confusion in the

25 *Mocano*. "Mocanos are judgments realized from person to person without any paperwork involved" (Cadornega [1680] 1972, II: 61). Kk. *mòkána, mòkéné*, to entertain, to speak with each other (Sw.). Kmb. *múkanu* (class *mu-mi*), condemnation.

territory “controlled” by the Portuguese. If we accept the authenticity of Sousa’s transcription, Mbuyla was clearly trying to radicalize the struggle against the Portuguese. In contrast to queen Njinga, whose intermittent war against the Portuguese was basically defensive, Mbuyla seems to have formulated the ideological bases for an anti-colonial movement of a messianic type (Queiroz 1977). By declaring himself *mani* of Portugal, he claims (near) divine *status* of the distant European king. In other words, he assumes the right to choose, to his liking, the personalities to whom he will entrust the different local governments. His wife will rule the kingdom of Congo; a mestizo, as he declares later, will govern that of Angola. The Portuguese field marshal will have the privilege of being one of his own “elders”. Ironically, there is no place left for the actual governor, Fernão de Sousa. Mbuyla’s speech presents an openly messianic utopia. The prophet, thanks to his supernatural power, will invert the actual political situation. As in other similar cases, the power of words substitutes power the speaker is not likely to win. As a matter of fact, the messianic utopia Fernão de Sousa attributes to Mbuyla is only an extreme form of a seemingly widespread “dissidence” among the *soba* “vassals” of the Portuguese.

10. The language of flight

Until now, little attention has been paid to the interventions – at least the more or less “autonomous” interventions – of common people in the “dialogue” or “war of discourses” between Africans and Europeans in “Angola”. Unfortunately, the Portuguese chronicles and reports do not offer much evidence about the speech and the attitudes anonymous Africans used to adopt under the known circumstances. Apart from occasional testimonies about events witnessed only by them, common African people – free, freed or enslaved – do not speak on the pages of Fernão de Sousa’s “Extensive report” nor on those of any of the other documents I have mentioned. Their part is mostly reduced to that of *pieces* in a game played by others, Africans or Portuguese. It is not easy, therefore, to recover their “discourse”, but, with some effort, we can retrieve a few allusions to their more “practical” attitudes. In a way, an attitude is also a “language”. In the Angola wars, the most common attitude of the African masses is to flee. Besides its

practical purposes, flight is a sort of language used mainly by those with no voice in the sphere of power. The message that common Africans delivered by their flight was their refusal of Portuguese colonization and its perverse effects on their traditional life. Fernão de Sousa clearly understands this language. The Africans, he explains, flee to escape war and to avoid enslavement by the Portuguese or their African allies. Often, he acknowledges, they try to take refuge on the lands controlled by queen Njinga or to flee to the residence of a still independent *soba*. All these "statements" in the language of flight clearly underline the common African's aversion to European colonization. The Portuguese quickly felt the veiled threat contained in such "messages". Sebastião Dias Tissão, the old soldier capable of speaking in riddles like his Bantu interlocutors, informed the governor that "Ginga had recruited people and planned to reconquer the land; that our slaves ran away again taking refuge with her, through which she made herself more powerful and weakened our position" (Sousa 1985: 241). How to respond to the fugitives? Portuguese opinions on this point greatly differed. Preoccupied by the constant erosion of their slave capital, some Portuguese settlers proposed to Fernão de Sousa to "capture people of Quiçama [a still independent territory] in order to exchange them for the slaves of ours they have" (Sousa 1985: 323). The governor categorically rejected this proposal. He was afraid of "what could happen if said people were captured, as well as of the assaults they necessarily would launch on account of the protestations". All this, he argued,

> might lead to a revolt and block the shipment of provisions to this city [Luanda] as well as the navigation of the ships sailing upstream with goods, besides other accidents that might happen to the Portuguese traders who sail up and down the Coanza river, like the seizing of merchandises; by defending them, people might be killed, the *quilombo* [military headquarters] being to distant [to intervene].

Drawing attention to the catastrophic consequences to which a raid in Quissama might lead, Fernão de Sousa places the phenomenon of flight in the wider context of the "dialogue" between Portuguese and Africans. He understands that such movements must be "read" as signs of the only language threatened or enslaved Africans have at their disposal when they wish to be "heard" by the Portuguese: flight. As a matter of fact, Africans, by fleeing, show a certain disposition to

“dialogue”. That is what the governor tries to explain to the slavers: if they want to avoid the outburst of a general revolt that might even threaten the permanence of the Portuguese in the area, the have to decipher correctly the flight movements of the Africans. In contrast to the (common) slavers, the governor was aware of the danger implied by a unilateral breaking off of the “dialogue” with the Africans.

Another event referred to by Fernão de Sousa shows the consequences of the breaking off of the “dialogue”. In 1627, the politically-inadequate response given to the massive flight of the slaves of Luiz Mendes de Vasconcellos, former governor of Angola, caused a perilous situation in Ilamba (Souza 1985: 286). Pursued by Portuguese soldiers, the fleeing slaves joined a substantial number of free blacks and some “misguided” whites. With their two thousand bows and the political dynamics their guerrilla-like activities provoked, this uncommon army presented a serious threat to the Portuguese power in that zone. When the governor sent troops to avoid a ‘general mutiny’

> [...] the *tendalas*[26] [“representatives”] disappeared and did not obey the messages of Manuel Antunes [the Portuguese commander] and hid in the *mato* with the aim of defending themselves, out of fear of the crimes they had committed and of eating human flesh (Souza 1985: 286).

The breaking off of the “dialogue” is followed by the emergence of a nightmarish phantasm: the return of the Africans to the *mato*. If we recall the connotations of the *mato* as a space of “evil” in the imaginary of the Portuguese, the governor’s preoccupation cannot surprise us. Should the Africans return to their *matos*, all efforts of conquest and colonization would have to start all over again, and under much worse conditions. In contrast to the recently “discovered” Africans, the fleeing slaves, the freed slaves, or the whites who felt tempted by the liberty promised by the “bush”, had all the time necessary to ‘study’ their enemies. Moreover, they could oppose them with modern weapons.

11. Conclusions

At the beginning of this essay, I suggested that the war that developed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries between Portuguese and

26 Kmb. *tandála* (plural *ji*-).

Africans in the *matos* of the Congo-Angola region could be read as a sort of "dialogue" – or a "war of discourses" – between the European conquerors and their African adversaries. I hope to have demonstrated the interest of this approach. It allows us to "discover", in documentation written by the European aggressors, the different ways Africans – chiefs, common people, and slaves – "responded" and reacted to the penetration of the slave trade. The complicated histories I have tried to disentangle at least show that the inhabitants of Congo and Angola did not undergo passively the political, social and economical cataclysm caused by the Portuguese invasion. However, their "discourse" does not refer always to an attitude of radical resistance to the European conquest or to slavery. Many, maybe the majority, of the local chiefs seemed rather inclined to renounce a part of their sovereignty if by doing so they could take advantage of the economic possibilities promised by the presence of the European slave traders. Others, like queen Njinga, accepted the "dialogue" with the Portuguese, but without renouncing the defense of her sovereignty. Only few undertook the road of a more radical resistance. As for the African "masses", victims of the struggle between their chiefs and the European intruders, they fought above all for survival and against deportation to America, moving in accordance with the evolution of the military and political situation. Some fugitives managed to organize themselves as guerillas, threatening in this way the Portuguese power.

Throughout the whole story, the ones who dictated the rules of the game were, without any doubt, the Portuguese. How did they succeed in imposing their political hegemony? Their commercial power certainly impressed and attracted many local chiefs and may have persuaded them to fully cooperate with the foreigners. This argument, however, is not sufficient to explain the feeble reaction of many African chiefs to the Portuguese appropriation of the strategic points of their territory. There may be, of course, many reasons to explain the lack of "strategic" reaction of the local chiefs, but the most important, in my opinion, is the "rational" use of indiscriminate violence by the Portuguese. By following the traditional rules of war and negotiation they had learned throughout their local history, the Africans positioned themselves, from the beginning, in a place of strategic inferiority before a handful of truly "macchiavelian" intruders. Most likely, the advantage the Europeans won in the wars of Congo and Angola

was not their, uncertain, military superiority, but the terror they managed to inspire in the autochthonous population through acts of unpredictable, unjustified, indiscriminate, and murderous violence. In the first pages of this essay, we had the opportunity to appreciate, and be horrified by, several cases of such "strategic violence". As in other places where, at nearly the same time, Europeans established their hegemony or domination, the inexorable progress of the Portuguese conquest of Central Africa definitely conveys the triumph of a "modernity" that banishes, in the name of colonial efficiency, any consideration based in – European or local – tradition or ethics.

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